

Littleton Waller Tazewell to Andrew Jackson, March 30, 1829, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

LITTLETON W. TAZEWELL TO JACKSON.

Norfolk, Va. , March 30, 1829.

. . . . I have now redeemed the promise which I made, when I last had the honor to converse with you upon this subject;¹ but before I part with it, I hope you will pardon me, if I avail myself of the privilege, in which you have sometimes indulged me, of making to you some suggestions in relation to this matter, that may perhaps be found worthy of more reflection, than you have had occasion yet to bestow upon it. I present these to your own eye *only* ; and shall speak of them with the frankness that becomes me always to use, and in that spirit of candor, which will ever dictate what I may take occasion to say to you upon any subject.

I have reason for believing, that owing either to the practices of those who have preceded you in the administration, or to some wounded pride but badly concealed, or to some other cause, which it is not worth while even to conjecture, the Statesmen of Great Britain, view your accession to the place you now hold, with no very kind feelings; and that if they do not seek to embarrass you, they will at least treat with much indifference, any overtures made by the U. S. to re-open a negotiation with them. Should this impression of mine be found to be correct, it is very obvious, that any direct offer to negotiate at this time, must be productive of some mortification, if not of future mischief. The first care of our minister therefore, should be, to remove any false impressions that may exist in England in regard to this country, and especially in respect to the views and policy of your administration. Until this object shall be accomplished, any attempt to negotiate, would be much worse

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than useless. Even after the Minister has succeeded however, (and there is no doubt but by a prudent course he will succeed) it would be still impolitic to make any direct offer to treat, until he was assured that such an overture would be received with satisfaction, and met with cordiality.

1 Littleton W. Tazewell was U. S. senator from Virginia 1824–1832. See Van Buren, *Autobiography*, p. 256. Jackson had offered Tazewell the post of minister to London. Tazewell had asked for time to consider the state of his private affairs and began this letter by saying that they were in such a situation that he could not accept the position offered. He then proceeded to discuss Great Britain.

The native character of British Statesmen constitutes a very strong obstacle to the acquisition of any certain information upon this point. They are all cautious cold and reserved by nature, and must be stimulated by some excitement, before they will allow themselves to express what they really feel, and what the interests of their own Country requires that they should utter. Mere general declarations of the disposition of the U. S. to adjust with them all the differences existing between the two countries, may not be sufficient to break the ice, with which a British statesman is always encrusted. Some more special, and therefore more powerful stimulant may be requisite, to make him move promptly, and speak decidedly. This can easily be supplied, by opening a negociation for a commercial treaty with France. Let the Minister of the U. S. in England be informed of this fact, with directions to hint at it, upon some fit occasion, in the presence of the British Minister, and my life upon it, the tone and temper of the British cabinet towards us, will be at once changed. That cabinet will then no longer regard with indifference, our general declarations of an amicable temper towards them; but will reciprocate such declarations, with an earnestness and cordiality, the very rarity of which will be a strong pledge of its sincerity. The negociation may then be commenced, with happy auspices of its successful termination. But if commenced before, it will very probably drag on heavily, if it does not soon come to such a rupture, as may do mischief both at home and abroad. I would suggest to you then the propriety of dispatching a Minister to France, previously,

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or certainly simultaneously with one to Great-Britain; and the necessity of instructing the former, to open a negotiation for a liberal commercial treaty with France, and to communicate freely and promptly with the latter, as to his progress in this negotiation. Let the Minister to Great Britain be apprised of these instructions, before he leaves this country; and be directed to govern himself in his intercourse with the British Ministry, according to the effects they may produce, should circumstances seem to require it.

The preceding remarks will sufficiently shew, if indeed you required any such proof, that it is all-important, that the Minister to Great-Britain should be a man high in the confidence of this government, and known to the world so to be. That he should be one of much intelligence, of amiable manners, and of quick and sure observation. In one word, that he should possess not less of tact than of judgment; and of sufficient discretion to discriminate accurately and properly, when he should rely upon the one or the other of these qualities most. In casting my eye around the circle of our friends, to find one who might answer this description, I can think of none to whom it applies more truly, than to the Attorney General Mr. Berrien. His present situation marks him to the world as one high in your confidence; and the appointment of one of your cabinet, will be the best pledge you can offer to Great Britain, of the zeal and sincerity of your wishes towards her. It will be quite unnecessary for me to enlarge before you upon the other qualifications of Mr. Berrien, you know him as well as I do, and will probably concur with me in opinion, that you can find no person better suited to the service which you wish performed. You can find no difficulty in filling the place of the Attorney General, altho' you will probably be much perplexed to find one better qualified than Mr. Berrien to fill the other situation.²

² The post was offered to Berrien, who declined it; it finally went to Louis McLane.

I have felt it my duty to make these suggestions to you, under the hope, that you will not think me trespassing too far on your goodness, while offering such unasked for advice. To this let me add, that if at any time, or in any way, you may think I can be of service to you,

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I hope you will freely command me, under the assurance, that there is nothing which may be within my power to perform that I will not readily do.

With very high respect, and much esteem and regard,